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Attorney Docket No.: 0180151

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In the Claims:**Claims 1 -20 (canceled)**

**Claim 21 (currently amended):** A method for forming a field-effect transistor on a substrate, said method comprising:

forming a high-k dielectric layer over said substrate;

forming a gate electrode layer over said high-k dielectric layer;

etching said gate electrode layer and said high-k dielectric layer to form a gate stack comprising a high-k dielectric segment situated over said substrate and a gate electrode segment situated over said high-k dielectric segment, said step of etching said gate electrode layer and said high-k dielectric layer being performed in a plasma process chamber;

performing a nitridation process in said plasma process chamber on said gate stack immediately after said step of etching said gate electrode layer and said high-k dielectric layer, said nitridation process utilizing a nitrogen containing plasma to nitridate sidewalls of said high-k dielectric segment, said nitridation process on said high-k dielectric segment causing nitrogen to enter said high-k dielectric segment, said nitrogen forming an oxygen diffusion barrier in said high-k dielectric segment and preventing lateral diffusion of oxygen into said high-k dielectric segment;

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repairing damage on said sidewalls of said high-k dielectric segment caused during said step of etching said gate electrode layer and said high-k dielectric layer.

**Claim 22 (previously presented):** The method of claim 21 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises hafnium oxide.

**Claim 23 (previously presented):** The method of claim 21 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises hafnium silicate.

**Claim 24 (previously presented):** The method of claim 21 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises zirconium oxide.

**Claim 25 (previously presented):** The method of claim 21 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises zirconium silicate.

**Claim 26 (previously presented):** The method of claim 21 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises aluminum oxide.

**Claim 27 (previously presented):** The method of claim 21 wherein said gate electrode segment comprises polysilicon.

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**Claim 28 (currently amended):** A method for forming a field-effect transistor including a high-k dielectric layer situated over a substrate and a gate electrode layer situated over said high-k dielectric layer, said method comprising steps of:

etching said gate electrode layer and said high-k dielectric layer to form a gate stack, said gate stack comprising a high-k dielectric segment situated over said substrate and a gate electrode segment situated over said high-k dielectric segment, said gate stack comprising sidewalls;

utilizing a nitrogen plasma to nitridate said sidewalls of said gate stack immediately after said step of etching said gate electrode layer and said high-k dielectric layer;

wherein said step of etching said gate electrode layer and said high-k dielectric layer to form said gate stack is performed in a plasma process chamber being utilized to perform said step of performing said nitridation process on said gate stack;

repairing damage on said sidewalls of said gate stack caused during said step of etching said gate electrode layer and said high-k dielectric layer;

forming source/drain regions adjacent to said gate stack;

fabricating spacers on said sidewalls of said gate stack;

performing a rapid thermal anneal on said gate stack.

**Claim 29 (previously presented):** The method of claim 28 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises hafnium oxide.

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**Claim 30 (previously presented):** The method of claim 28 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises hafnium silicate.

**Claim 31 (previously presented):** The method of claim 28 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises zirconium oxide.

**Claim 32 (previously presented):** The method of claim 28 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises zirconium silicate.

**Claim 33 (previously presented):** The method of claim 28 wherein said high-k dielectric layer comprises aluminum oxide.

**Claim 34 (previously presented):** The method of claim 28 wherein said gate electrode segment comprises polysilicon.